



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/846/Part III/2
2 August 1995

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Forty-sixth session

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UNITED NATIONS
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UNHCR ACTIVITIES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS:
REPORT FOR 1994-1995 AND PROPOSED PROGRAMMES AND
BUDGET FOR 1996

PART III. EUROPE

Section 2 - Northern Europe and the Baltic Countries

(submitted by the High Commissioner)

III.2 NORTHERN EUROPE AND THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

A. Northern European countries

1. Beneficiary population

1. At 31 December 1994, there were an estimated 260,230 persons of concern to UNHCR in the five Nordic countries, the majority of whom lived in Sweden (177,000), followed by Denmark (45,100), Norway (26,600), Finland (11,300) and Iceland (200). The estimates for Norway and Sweden are provided by UNHCR and are based on the number of persons granted Convention status or another humanitarian status since 1985, while the numbers for Denmark, Finland and Iceland are government estimates. The total number of asylum-seekers arriving in 1994 was 29,500 compared to 66,800 in 1993. In addition, some 10,000 refugees were admitted under various resettlement quotas. The trend of fewer asylum-seekers arriving, which started in the second half of 1993 and continued throughout 1994, is also continuing in 1995.

2. Developments in 1994 and 1995

2. In all the Nordic countries, the discussion on new refugee and migration policies has continued despite an overall decrease in numbers of asylum-seekers. The focus was largely on global and regional strategic issues, including the future use of temporary protection and ways to enhance voluntary repatriation as a durable solution for refugees. The membership of Sweden and Finland in the European Union (EU) has contributed additional elements to parts of this discussion.

3. 1996 country programmes

(a) Regional objectives

3. In 1996, the Regional Office in Stockholm will continue to promote the development of refugee policies in the respective countries with a view to ensuring their consistency with international protection standards. The concept of temporary protection and its application in the Nordic context will continue to be of concern to UNHCR as well as the fact that with the admittance of Finland and Sweden to the European Union, Norway is left outside of the harmonization process.

4. As part of its overall strategy in Europe, UNHCR will continue to provide advice and refugee law training to government officials, lawyers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UNHCR's decision to cease handling individual casework has been implemented in the Nordic region since the beginning of 1995. Assistance as well as social and legal counselling will be provided by Governments and NGOs.

5. In 1994, the Nordic countries contributed 16.5 per cent of UNHCR's total budget. The Regional Office in Stockholm will strive to maintain this level of support despite a harsher economic climate in several countries in the region.

(i) Denmark

6. During 1994, 6,650 asylum-seekers arrived, representing a 46 per cent decrease compared to 1993, when some 14,350 asylum applications were filed. Refugees from the former Yugoslavia who had been given temporary permits with the anticipation of their return were gradually allowed to enter the normal asylum procedure following the Government's decision to allow refugees under the temporary protection regime to enter the regular asylum procedure after a two-year stay in Denmark.

7. More attention was focused by the authorities on the situation in Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States with the aim of preventing persons from abusing the Danish asylum institution.

(ii) Finland

8. A total of 840 asylum-seekers arrived during 1994, compared to 2,020 in 1993.

9. The Finnish authorities have maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Russian and Baltic States authorities in the field of refugee and migration issues. In the course of 1994, it was decided to add Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation to the list of countries considered "safe" for their own citizens.

(iii) Iceland

10. At the end of 1994, the refugee population in the country numbered some 200. This figure is the same as for the previous year.

11. The Government review of refugee policy initiated in 1994 is yet to produce any changes in admission of refugees in Iceland.

(iv) Norway

12. A total of 3,380 asylum-seekers arrived in Norway in 1994 as compared to 12,880 in 1993. The decrease is mainly due to an overall decrease in the number of persons coming from the former Yugoslavia.

13. The Norwegian parliament decided in June 1995 that refugees from the former Yugoslavia admitted under the temporary protection arrangement should be allowed to enter the normal asylum procedure after a three-year stay in Norway.

(v) Sweden

14. Between 1985 and 1994 Sweden granted Convention refugee status to some 37,000 persons, while another 140,000 persons were allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds. During 1994, some 45,000 persons were allowed to stay for refugee and refugee-like reasons, some 80 per cent of whom were from the former Yugoslavia. A total of 18,640 asylum-seekers arrived during 1994 compared to 37,581 in 1993.

15. The reduction in the number of asylum-seekers over the last two years has allowed governmental and local refugee authorities to gradually reduce reception facilities thus reducing overall costs and staff.

16. The Swedish Government decided in April 1994 to grant permanent residence permits on humanitarian grounds to some 18,000 asylum-seekers of various nationalities, predominantly Kosovars of Albanian origin, if they had arrived before 1 January 1993 and if the families had children who were below 18 years of age on that particular date. A group of some 5,000 Croatian passport holders, mostly of Bosnian Croat origin, were given temporary residence permits for six months in May 1995.

17. A legal counselling project for asylum-seekers and refugees was initiated by UNHCR to relieve its individual case work. The project will continue in 1996 to be implemented by the Swedish Red Cross for activities related to family reunification and the Advisory Centre for Asylum-seekers for matters relating to country of origin information and general legal advice to lawyers and asylum-seekers. Refugee law training activities will be implemented directly by the Regional Office in Stockholm.

B. Baltic countries

1. Beneficiary population

18. Asylum-seekers continued to arrive in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, usually after spending some time in the Russian Federation or other countries in the region. Almost all of them intend to proceed to the Nordic countries. Some 200 asylum-seekers have been in prolonged detention in Estonia and Latvia during 1994-1995, but it cannot be excluded that there is a higher number of persons of concern to UNHCR among the thousands of transmigrants in the Baltic States.

19. None of the Baltic States have yet acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or the 1967 Protocol, although all have expressed their intention to do so in the future.

2. Developments in 1994 and 1995

20. Virtually no institution or organization in the Baltic region has the experience required for dealing with legal and social issues related to asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR's main objective in the region is to provide legal and practical advice and support to Governments to assist them in adopting national refugee legislation and starting implementation of reception policies.

21. UNHCR began a care and maintenance programme in the Baltic countries in 1995 with the aim of achieving this objective through assisting governmental and non-governmental organizations in terms of consultancy services, institution-building equipment, familiarization visits and training of staff. The UNDP offices in Tallin, Riga and Vilnius are charged with monitoring the situation in the region on behalf of UNHCR and providing administrative services to UNHCR and limited assistance to individual asylum-seekers as required.

3. 1996 country programmes

(a) Objectives

22. UNHCR will continue its promotional activities aiming at the early accession of the Baltic countries to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. It is likely that the number of asylum-seekers will increase in 1996 due to difficulties experienced in the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine in dealing with transit migration.

23. It is expected that basic systems for reception of asylum-seekers and refugees will be established in the Baltic countries during 1996. In this connection, UNHCR will play a catalytic and complementary role towards reinforcing the general infrastructure in the region and soliciting additional support from bilateral and regional sources of funding. Information exchange between the Nordic and Baltic countries in the field of refugees as well as monitoring of contributions to avoid duplication of efforts will continue in 1996.

24. In Lithuania, a new refugee law was adopted in June 1995, which will enhance the need for international support in the areas of border control, establishment of reception centres, training of staff and institutional support to the ministries involved. UNHCR will provide support to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour for the establishment of the "Council of Refugees", which will serve as an appeal body. UNHCR will also support the establishment of the first reception centre and will provide training for officials involved in the implementation of the law.

25. The presence of some 100 asylum-seekers in Latvia, held in difficult detention conditions, requires assistance pending the establishment of a reception policy for asylum-seekers. UNHCR will help to improve the current premises and provide assistance through an NGO. An allocation to meet similar needs in the other Baltic countries is also planned.

(b) Proposed budget for 1996

26. Activities in 1996 will depend largely on an evaluation of the 1995 programme but are planned to aim at strengthening the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees. The 1996 allocation will be insufficient to cover the desired reception capacity. However, it is hoped that additional support will be drawn from concerned Governments and regional institutions for this purpose as the need for assistance continues to grow.

(c) Implementing partners

27. It is expected that the implementation of UNHCR's assistance programme in Latvia will be carried out by CARITAS. The Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour will be responsible for implementing the legal assistance programme in Lithuania. It is hoped that an implementing partner in Estonia will soon be identified.

(d) **Programme Delivery and Administrative Support Costs**

28. Variations due to changes in budget parameters are not discussed in the subsequent analysis (Overview of UNHCR Activities, Part I (A/AC.96/845) refers).

(i) **1994 expenditure (all sources of funds)**

29. The 1994 expenditure was lower than revised estimates mainly because of savings resulting from the fact that the post of the Regional Representative was vacant during the first part of the year and the post of Public Information Officer was vacant during the latter half of the year.

(ii) **Revised 1995 requirements (all sources of funds)**

30. The revised 1995 requirements are higher than initial estimates due to increased staff and travel costs. In addition, the move of the UNHCR office to new premises during the year necessitates the procurement of new office furniture and equipment. New public information activities are now being developed in the Nordic countries.

(iii) **Initial 1996 requirements**

31. The 1996 requirements are slightly lower than in 1995 as non-expendable property needs will be minimal compared to 1995.

UNHCR EXPENDITURE IN NORTHERN EUROPE AND BALTIC COUNTRIES

(in thousands of United States dollars)

1994	1995			1996	
AMOUNT OBLIGATED	ALLOCATION APPROVED BY 1994 EXCOM	PROPOSED REVISED ALLOCATION		SOURCE OF FUNDS AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE	PROPOSED ALLOCATION/ PROJECTION
GENERAL PROGRAMMES (1)					
1.2 a/ -	- 300.0	- 300.0	Sweden Baltic States	CARE AND MAINTENANCE	- 300.0
2.7 a/ 4.4 a/	- -	- -	Denmark Sweden	VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION	- -
-	100.0	103.6	Sweden	LOCAL SETTLEMENT	86.4
0.4 a/	-	-	Sweden	RESETTLEMENT	-
762.7	911.9	1,083.2	Sweden	PROGRAMME DELIVERY See Overview Tables (Part II)	1,047.6
771.4	1,311.9	1,486.8		SUB-TOTAL OPERATIONS	1,434.0
97.0	97.6	83.3	Sweden	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT See Overview Tables (Part II)	79.7
868.4	1,409.5	1,570.1		TOTAL (1)	1,513.7
SPECIAL PROGRAMMES (2)					
4.2	-	-	Sweden	OTHER TRUST FUNDS	-
4.2	0.0	0.0		TOTAL (2)	0.0
872.6	1,409.5	1,570.1		GRAND TOTAL (1+2)	1,513.7

a/ obligation incurred against Other Programmes